

Truckers Protests – Situation Report 1

Key Findings

- RRM Canada has not seen evidence of significant foreign state sponsored involvement in the online information space to date.
- RRM Canada notes that some foreign state media and grey media (sites with suspected links to state media) are amplifying narratives critical of the Prime Minister and the government's handling of the protest, but the majority of online content appears to derive from domestic and transnational non-state actors, including ideologically motivated (IM), conspiratorial, and COVID disinformation communities, as well as average users.
- Facebook has reported¹ that some groups/pages targeting American sympathizers, including IMVE communities, were run by content mills in countries including Vietnam, Bangladesh, Romania, but there is no evidence of state affiliation and motivation could be profit.

Purpose

RRM Canada is monitoring the online information ecosystem for indications of foreign state sponsored information manipulation related to the truckers protests. RRM Canada will continue to monitor and provide reporting on an as needed basis.

Methodology

RRM Canada used a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to monitor for foreign state sponsored information manipulation, including examining networks of websites, social listening platforms, engaging in content and narrative analysis, as well as in-house data analysis for mainstream social media platforms. This report covers the period of January 27th to February 11th.

Findings

Foreign state media and grey media pushing false, misleading and critical narratives. RRM Canada analysed a network of websites based on a list of well-established disinformation sites, including those associated, aligned or in some way linked with hostile foreign actors. We observed several s.38 or linked sites producing or amplifying content from domestic/transnational community sites framing the Prime Minister and the government in a negative light. Prominent publishers of content among this network of foreign disinformation websites are: Global Research, South Front, 21st Century Wire and Fort Russ.

It is a common tactic, particularly prevalent throughout the pandemic, for foreign disinformation and grey media sites to leverage content from ideologically motivated (IM), conspiratorial, anti-

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/us-trucker-convoy-picks-momentum-foreign-meddling-adds-fray-rcna15932>

vac and COVID disinformation sites to amplify narratives in support of their geostrategic goals. Networks of foreign disinformation sites often reproduce, give voice to, or offer a platform to those who amplify narratives that align with existing propaganda. For example, an Ontario MPP was recently invited to speak on *Russia Today* (RT) in an effort to amplify content critical of the PM and the Canadian government. Domestic and transnational communities are also known to leverage foreign state-aligned propaganda. This likely explains the increased output of articles that support the protests while sharing false, misleading, or negative content about the PM and the Canadian government.

These websites are promoting the following narratives:

- Asserting the majority of Canadians support the protests and only a minority support the actions of the government
- Suggesting the PM is hiding from protesters and is acting in violation of their right to protest
- Questioning the efficacy and lawfulness of the pandemic restrictions and vaccine mandates; labelling them as authoritarian
- Questioning whether the PM has been vaccinated
- Contrasting the PM's previous comments on the Indian farmers protest as a sign of hypocrisy regarding the right to protest in the current context; misleading/falsely claiming the government's approach is unlawful

RRM Canada notes low engagement on articles overall with only a small portion reaching past 100 engagements, and those that do have relatively high scores in our collection generally fell between 200-350 engagements². The overwhelming majority of content saw shares and engagement of articles as of this point falling in the double-digit range. This also accounts for content and articles that were reproduced and back-linked across multiple sites largely determined to be for profit making, rather than ideological.

Social media network, community and discourse analysis: RRM Canada collected data across Twitter using keywords and hashtags relevant to the overall discussion in order to complete a network-level analysis for activity on the platform.

RRM Canada notes some minor amplification of various narratives and incidents online. This includes very minute reproduction of tweets referencing the Ontario MPPs RT interview redirecting users to Rumble accounts. The most significant form of amplification came in the form of s.38 bot and troll networks repeating narratives focused on the PM's hypocrisy in relation to the Indian farmers protest in 2020 and those that support the Truckers' protest. These were aided by s.38 as well as key s.38

² Engagements include all meaningful interactions recorded by a social media platform and backlinks. In this case, our metric encompasses: Facebook likes, shares and comments, Twitter shares (i.e. posts, retweets), Pinterest shares, Reddit engagements (shares, upvotes, comments) and any sources backlinking to the original item.

s.38 [REDACTED] producing content critical of the PM and misrepresenting the PM and the government's actions as unlawful. While the networks' activity subsided compared to higher levels in the early days of the protest, the narratives, content, and posts were amplified later once domestic actors noted them, reshared and increased their salience.

G7 RRM Partner Reporting. RRM Canada has discussed our findings with G7 RRM partners. They are not currently tracking in a concerted manner. This may well change; the Canadian protests having captured the popular imagination of various transnational actors with localized protests emerging in places like Australia, Finland, and France.

Next Steps

RRM Canada will continue to monitor the information environment for potential foreign efforts to manipulate the information environment related to the Truckers' protests.

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